

Historic UN climate deal approved after last minute objections

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Body

Negotiators early Sunday approved a historic deal that would create a fund for compensating poor nations that are victims of extreme weather worsened by rich countries' carbon pollution, but an overall larger agreement still was up in the air because of a fight over emission reduction efforts.

After that vote, talks on other aspects of the negotiations were put on hold while delegates were given 30 minutes to read texts of other measures they were to vote on.

The decision establishes a fund for what negotiators call loss and damage. It is a big win for poorer nations which have long called for cash - sometimes viewed as reparations - as they are often victims of climate worsened floods, droughts, heat waves, famines and storms despite having contributed little to the pollution that heats up the globe

"This is how a 30-year-old journey of ours has finally, we hope, found fruition today," said Pakistan Climate Minister Sherry Rehman, who often took the lead for the world's poorest nations. One-third of her nation was submerged this summer by a devastating flood and she and other officials used the motto: "What went on in Pakistan will not stay in Pakistan."

It's a reflection of what can be done when the poorest nations remain unified, said Alex Scott, a climate diplomacy expert at the think tank E3G. "I think this is huge to have governments coming together to actually work out at least the first step of ... how to deal with the issue of loss and damage," she said. But like all climate financials, it is one thing to create a fund, and another to get money flowing in and out.

The agreement "offers hope to the vulnerable people that they will get help to recover from climate disasters and rebuild their lives," said Harjeet Singh, head of global political strategy at Climate Action Network International.

Germany climate envoy Jennifer Morgan and Chilean Environment Minister Maisa Rojas, who shepherded the deal on to the agenda and to the finish line, hugged each other after passage, posed for a photo and said "yeah, we made it!"

According to the agreement, the fund would initially draw on contributions from developed countries and other private and public sources such as international financial institutions. While major emerging economies such as China would not initially be required to contribute, that option remains on the table and will be negotiated over the coming years. This is a key demand by the European Union and the United States, who argue that China and other large polluters currently classified as developing countries have the financial clout and responsibility to pay their way.

The fund would be largely aimed at the most vulnerable nations, though there would be room for middle-income countries that are severely battered by climate disasters to get aid.

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Bleary-eyed rumpled delegations began to fill the plenary room 4 a.m. local time Sunday without seeing the overarching cover decision.

Going into the final session, battle lines were drawn over India's request to change last year's agreement that called for a phase down of "unabated coal" to include a phase down of oil and natural gas, two other fossil fuels that produce heat-trapping gases. While European nations and others keep pushing for that language, Saudi Arabia, Russia and Nigeria have been insistent on keeping it out.

"We are extremely on overtime. There were some good spirits earlier today. I think more people are more frustrated about the lack of progress," Norwegian climate change minister Espen Barth Eide said. He said it came down to getting tougher on fossil fuel emissions and retaining the goal of limiting warming to 1.5C since pre-industrial times as was agreed in last year's climate summit in Glasgow.

"We have to reduce our use of fossil fuels," Eide said. "But there's a very strong fossil fuel lobby ... trying to block any language that we produce. So that's quite clear."

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